

Otis L. Sanford's column "Union support for Ford made Wharton mad" (October 16, 2011) stated that the City unions opposed the Mayor's re-election "out of protest against Wharton for going along with a 4.6 percent cut in employee salaries to balance the 2012 budget. The unions also don't like a proposal that would change the employee pension program."

Sanford's column showed a lack of understanding of the unions' grievances with Mayor Wharton. Sanford left out the most important reason the unions did not support Mayor Wharton for re-election. He went back on his word! They say a man is only so good as his word!

During negotiations with the City unions in the spring of this year, the Mayor's representatives told union representatives that, if the unions would agree not to ask for any raises, the administration would not ask for any cuts, and wages and benefits would remain the same. Recognizing the state of the economy, the unions agreed to forego negotiating wage or benefit increases, and instead focused on negotiating language in the agreements that would improve the efficiency of City operations with no associated cost. This was the agreement reached with all the unions as of the end of March 2011. The memberships of the unions accepted the agreement. Mayor Wharton signed agreements with the unions stating that there would be no change in wages for the 2011 fiscal year.

The ink was barely dry on Mayor Wharton's signature when he started lobbying the City Council for support of a budget that included a 4.6% reduction in employees' pay. Although certain members of the City Council certainly agreed with this strategy, contrary to Mr. Sanford's description, the Mayor did not "go along with" the pay cut, he proposed it.

By the time Mayor Wharton openly advocated changing the terms of the contracts which he signed with the unions, the time period for the unions to seek redress regarding the pay reduction through the City Council's impasse procedure had passed.

How could the unions in good conscience support Mayor Wharton when he turned his back on the agreements that he had just signed?

Sanford states that the Mayor is mad. What did he expect? The Mayor has tried to make it seem like he didn't cut the pay of hardworking City employees, but it was in fact done at the Mayor's behest. One would hope that the Mayor is a "bigger person" than someone who would hold a grudge against the unions for not supporting him. Unions are made up of people, in this case employees of the City of Memphis, citizens of the City of Memphis - the Mayor's constituents. Sanford says no one can deny the Mayor's popularity. Did this last election really show that? I don't think so. Rather, what it showed was apathy - hardly anyone voted!

All citizens of the United States have the right to express their political views without the fear of retaliation. The election is over. The unions and the Mayor should have a common goal - what is best for the citizens of the City of Memphis. The unions will continue to work toward that goal, but will not sacrifice the rights of their members in the process.

Otis Sanford - tell the whole story!

Larry Anthony
On behalf of the City of Memphis Employee Unions